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AUTHOR Blatt, Stephen J.; Benz, Carolyn
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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the relationships between a university standardized student evaluation of faculty teaching and students' perceptions of the communication skills used by the instructor. Subjects, 397 students taught by 12 instructors from the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Dayton (Ohio), completed the regular teacher evaluation and a communication style inventory about the instructors. Correlations between individual communication competency skills and student evaluation of the instructors were computed. Results indicated that: (1) supportiveness and empathy were correlated with instructors respecting students as persons; (2) altercentrism (being interested and responsive to the thought and ideas of others) showed a strong relationship with all instructor evaluation items; (3) as a communication competency, assertiveness had the weakest relationship with the instructor evaluation scale; and (4) the relationship between instructor evaluation items and the skills of social relaxation, interaction management, and self-disclosure ranged from weak to moderate. Findings suggest that empathy and supportiveness are essential ingredients in interpersonal communication competency, but that self-disclosure (supported by a large number of existing studies) and assertiveness are not as important. (Three tables of data are included; 17 references, the student evaluation form, and the teacher communication style form are attached.) (RS)

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ED 360 670

THE RELATIONSHIP OF COMMUNICATION COMPETENCY TO PERCEIVED TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS

BY

STEPHEN J BLATT
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION

CAROLYN BENZ
EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON
DAYTON, OH 45469

Paper presented at the Central States Communication Association Convention, Lexington, Ky. April, 1993

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INTRODUCTION

For many of America's colleges/universities one of the outcomes of the "Educational Reform" movement of the last decade has been to increase the press ure on faculty to account for their time both out of and in the classroom. Faculty have been scrutinized as to the size of the classes and the number of class hour contact. Now some state legislators are asking that faculty be held accountable for the quality of their class time and even learning outcomes.[1]

Notwithstanding the agendas of Secretaries of Education and state governments, university concerns for understanding the impact of teaching behaviors and teaching effectiveness have a long history. Classroom evaluation, while a joke to some and an annoyance for others, is a fact of life for most faculty in higher education. The University of Dayton student evaluation of faculty has been "on line" since the late 1970's. These student evaluations are a part of decision making for tenure, promotion and merit pay increases. However we were interested in exploring what factors influence these student ratings of faculty teaching. To gain more insight into this process, the university is sponsoring an on-going research program. This report on the relationship between student evaluation of instructors and student perceptions of instructor communication competency is one outcome of this research effort.

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[1] The Chronicle of High Education Vol. XXXIX, #31, April 9, 1993.

COMMUNICATION COMPETENCY AND TEACHING

Communication researchers have studied a variety of ways through which the instructor's communication behaviors have affected student perceptions of teachers and student learning.

In a study of the verbal behaviors of three award-winning teachers Nussbaum, Comadena, and Holladay (1987), reported self-disclosure was frequently found in teacher comments about course content. In a follow-up study of 57 college teachers, Downs, Javidi, and Nussbaum (1988) found they used a great deal of self-disclosure to clarify course content. An innovative study by Sorensen (1989) found a strong relationship between positive teacher self-disclosure and student affective learning, student perceived solidarity and student view of teacher immediacy.

Frymier and Thompson(1992) found that student perception of instructor character was significantly associated with instructor affinity-seeking behaviors (supportivness,altruism,non-verbal immediacy, etc.,) and that students' views of instructor competency was moderately associated.

In a study of teacher communication styles used in classroom teaching of adolescents, Potter and Emanuel (1990) found that high school students identified instructor communication styles of friendly,attentive and relaxed as being the most desirable and the styles of dominant and contentious as being the least desirable. Several studies have investigated the relationship between teacher immediacy and student learning. Richmond, Gorham, and McCroskey (1987) and Gorham (1988) found verbal & nonverbal immediacy to be significantly related to student reports of learning. In a novel approach to the study of immediacy Kelly & Gorham (1988) found that short-

term recall was significantly related to instructors' physical immediacy and eye contact. Christophel (1990) reported a strong positive relationship between teacher immediacy and perceptions of student learning.

In a recent state-of-the-art article on effective teacher behaviors Nussbaum (1992) notes "A majority of the research conducted on effective teacher behavior over the past few years provides further evidence that instructional processes makes a difference in the classroom. "

For the purpose of this study the instructional processes will be operationalized as communication behaviors, a number of which are examined above, that constitute communication competency. The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationships between a university standardized student evaluation of teaching with students' perceptions of the communication skills (competency) used by the instructor.

METHOD

THE PARTICIPANTS

Twelve instructors from the College of Arts and Science volunteered their classes for this study. Academic Departments represented included mathematics, philosophy, psychology, communication, sociology, religion, political science and music. Most classes were on the 200 to 300 level. A total of 397 students were involved in the study.

PROCEDURES

The College of Arts and Sciences mandates teaching evaluations of all instructors and classes during Fall and Winter terms. Evaluations are administered during the last two weeks of the 14 week term. For each class involved in the study (Fall, 1992) the following procedures were used:

1. The instructor introduced the researcher and then left the room.
2. The students were asked, (in addition to the regular teacher evaluation) to complete a Communication Style Inventory about the instructor.
3. Instructions were read aloud for both the teacher evaluation and the inventory.

MATERIALS

STUDENT EVALUATION OF FACULTY INSTRUMENT

The instrument used for student evaluation of faculty teaching was developed in the 1970's and revised in 1990. The instrument seeks student input on 1) student demographic data, 2) student over-all rating of the class and instructor, 3) student evaluation of the instructor, student evaluation of course goals, assignments, examinations, etc., and 4) student assessment of the evaluation procedure. (see Appendix A)

For the purpose of this study only the statements dealing with student evaluation of the instructor were used (items 10-17 on the instrument). These statements are:

10. The instructor prepared well for classes
11. The instructor spoke clearly and audibly
12. The subject matter was clearly presented by the instructor

13. The instructor put material across in an interesting way
14. Students were able to express themselves freely as result of the instructor's openness to their ideas
15. The instructor was willing to help students who experienced difficulty in the course.
16. The instructor respected students as persons
17. The instructor was fair in grading examinations and assignments.

Students were asked to respond to each statement on a 5 point scale, from a (5) Strongly Agree to a (1) Strongly Disagree.

COMMUNICATION COMPETENCY INSTRUMENT

There are many individual approaches to measuring interpersonal communication competency(Bienvenu,1973; Brandt,1979; Henderson & Furnham, 1982; Kelly and Chase, 1978; Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984; Wiemann, 1977). Rubin (1991) combined a number of dimensions in her development of an interpersonal communication competency scale, (ICC). The Rubin instrument was selected for this study because it is an inclusive, (involves the essential elements of Appropriateness, Effectiveness and Behavioral Flexibility), skill-based measure of communication behaviors often associated with teacher-student interaction in the classroom. As Rubin (1991) suggests, the instrument provides a, "...brief, global, self-report measure of 10 interpersonal communication competence skills" (p.1).

The 10 interpersonal communication competency skills included in the ICC scale were:

1. Self-Disclosure
2. Empathy
3. Social Relaxation
4. Immediacy
5. Environmental control
6. Altercentrism
7. Assertiveness
8. Interaction Management
9. Expressiveness
10. Supportiveness (Rubin,1991,1-4)

Based upon Rubin's recommendations these researchers adapted the original 60 item, self-report scale and produced a 30 item scale which ask students to rate their instructor on the 10 competency skills along a six interval strongly agree-strongly disagree continuum. (see Appendix B).

RESULTS

The focus of this study was on the relationship between the items used to evaluate teaching in university classrooms and the students impressions of the interpersonal communication competency of the instructor. Table 1 lists the means and SD's for the instructor items of the Student Evaluation of Faculty Scale.

Table 2 presents the means and SD's for each of the 10 communication competency skills. Among the 10 skills teachers scored highest on Assertiveness and lowest on Empathy. The mean scores for all skills fell between the Mildly Agree and the Moderately Agree responses.

Relationships between Skills and Instructor Evaluation

The correlations between individual communication competency skills and the 8 instructor items are detailed in Table 3. Supportiveness and Empathy have the strongest correlations overall, with item #16 INSTRUCTOR RESPECTED STUDENTS AS PERSONS reporting r= 0.53 and r= 0.51. There is no doubt that these students' view of instructor respect for them was strongly related to the instructors' skill in projecting supportive and Empathic behaviors. Students seem to associate emotive, sharing, equality, confirming, etc., with high instructor ratings on item 16.

Altercentrism (being interested & responsive to the thoughts and ideas of others) shows a strong relationship with all instructor evaluation items. This was especially true with item #14 STUDENTS EXPRESS THEMSELVES FREELY AS A RESULT OF THE INSTRUCTORS OPENNESS TO THEIR IDEAS, r= 0.48, and to item #16, r= 0.44.

The communication competency skill of Environmental Control (where one deals with others, using appropriate ways to satisfy needs and achieve goals through effective communication) also shows a strong relationship with instructor ratings, # 11 THE INSTRUCTOR SPOKE CLEARLY AND AUDIBLY, r= 0.41; #12 THE SUBJECT MATTER WAS CLEARLY PRESENTED BY THE INSTRUCTOR, r=0.46; #13 THE

INSTRUCTOR PUT MATERIAL ACROSS IN AN INTERESTING WAY, r=0.44. Items #11, #12, and #13 are the evaluation items that describe the instructor's delivery. These strong correlations seem to indicate that students relate to instructors who practice effective delivery skills.

The across item relationships between Immediacy (using non-verbal behaviors to signal you are approachable and available for communication) and Expressiveness (communicating feelings though skillful use of verbal/non-verbal expressions) are in the moderate to moderate high range. However, there is a strong connection with the student evaluation of instructor delivery, items #11, 12 and #13.

The relationship between the instructor evaluation items and the communication competency skills of Social Relaxation, Interaction Management and Self-Disclosure are similar, with some items having weak relationships, others having moderate to moderately high connections.

As a communication competency, Assertiveness had the weakest relationship with the instructor evaluation scale. There was no significant relationship with item #15, INSTRUCTOR WAS WILLING TO HELP STUDENTS WHO EXPERIENCED DIFFICULTY IN THE COURSE or item #17 INSTRUCTOR WAS FAIR IN GRADING EXAMINATIONS AND ASSIGNMENTS.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study can shed light on the question of the connection between students' perceptions of their instructor as a classroom teacher and students' perceptions of their instructor's communication competency. First, it would seem that the research

which identifies Empathy and Supportivness as essential ingredients in interpersonal communication competency was strongly supported. Instructors who scored high in these two skills were given the best over-all instructor ratings. The implication is that students believe that instructors competent in Empathy and Supportiveness respected the students as persons.

On the other hand, the large amounts of research supporting Self-Disclosure as an important, dominate skill involved in effective teaching was not fully validated by the present study. Student ratings of instructor and students' perceptions of instructor Self-Disclosure showed a weaker relationship than did seven of the other competency skills. In a similar vain classroom Assertiveness, where the instructor stands up for his self and uses persuasion to influence others, had the weakest correlation with student ratings of instructor.

If an instructor desires to be perceived as FAIR IN GRADING she needs to use the communication competency skills of Supportiveness, Empathy and Altercentrism, all of which have a strong "other orientation".

Within the 8 items of the Instructor Evaluation Scale, three were consistently in the moderately high to high range of the correlation coefficient, #11, #12, and #13. These items dealt with the instructor's voice, clearness of presentation and presenting material in an interesting way. If communication competency involves appropriateness and behavioral flexibility and they are demonstrated through the verbal/nonverbal delivery of the instructors, then the strength of these coefficients offer support for the validity of the Interpersonal Communication Competency Scale.

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TABLE 1

STUDENT EVALUATION OF FACULTY:
MEANS & STANDARD DEVIATIONS

No.	Item	mean	s.d.
10	The instructor prepared well for classes.	4.28	0.69
11	The instructor spoke clearly and audibly.	4.23	0.79
12	The subject matter was clearly presented by the instructor.	3.96	0.84
13	The instructor put material across in an interesting way.	3.80	0.97
14	Students were able to express themselves freely as a result of the instructor's openness to their ideas.	3.99	0.93
15	The instructor was willing to help students who experienced difficulty in the course.	3.99	0.79
16	The instructor respected students as persons.	4.10	0.75
17	The instructor was fair in grading examinations and assignments.	4.09	0.90

Items 10 through 17: scale: 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree

TABLE 2

COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE SKILLS:
MEANS & STANDARD DEVIATIONS

Dimension of Communication Competence	mean*	standard deviation
SELF-DISCLOSURE	13.01	3.01
EMPATHY	11.58	3.22
SOCIAL RELAXATION	13.79	3.28
ASSERTIVENESS	14.29	2.79
ALTERCENTRISM	12.44	3.20
INTERACTION MANAGEMENT	12.46	2.62
EXPRESSIVENESS	12.68	2.85
SUPPORTIVENESS	12.15	3.24
IMMEDIACY	13.44	2.93
ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROL	13.36	2.78

*Potential scores: 3 - 18
(Each skill is the sum of three items)

TABLE 3

CORRELATIONS BETWEEN COMPETENCY SKILLS AND INSTRUCTOR ITEMS

COMPETENCY SKILLS

ITEM #	SUP	EMP	ALT	E.C.	IMD	EXP	S-D	S.R.	I.M.	ASST
10	.30	.31	.34	.36	.20	.20	.14*	.13+	.22	.11+
11	.23	.28	.27	.41	.31	.39	.25	.24	.28	.25
12	.34	.40	.36	.46	.35	.34	.28	.29	.27	.27
13	.34	.38	.31	.44	.36	.40	.29	.31	.28	.33
14	.36	.42	.48	.29	.28	.23	.16*	.24	.17	.15*
15	.40	.36	.28	.18	.22	.14*	.21	.14*	.13+	.06n
16	.53	.51	.44	.32	.37	.24	.27	.29	.21	.16*
17	.32	.32	.26	.25	.17	14*	.18	.11+	.12+	.06n

N= 397

NOTE:
n indicates not significant
+ indicates p< .05
* indicates p< .01
all others p< .001

Appendix A

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

STUDENT EVALUATION OF FACULTY

I. Please supply the following biographical data by marking the appropriate letter on your scan sheet.

1. Your school: A. Arts and Sciences B. Education C. Business D. Engineering E. Egr. Technology
2. Your class: A. First Year B. Sophomore C. Junior D. Senior E. Other
3. Your sex: A. Male B. Female
4. This course was: A. Required B. Elective
5. Your current grade point average:

   A. Below 2.00 B. 2.00-2.50 C. 2.51-3.00 D. 3.01-3.50 E. 3.51-4.00
6. The grade I expect in this course is: A. "A" B. "B" C. "C" D. "D" E. "F"

II. Please respond to the following questions. If a question does not apply to this course, then disregard it. Mark the appropriate letter on your scan sheet.

A. Excellent B. Above average C. Average D. Below average E. Poor

7. Everything considered, how would you rate this course?
8. Everything considered, how would you rate this instructor?

III. Please respond to the following by marking the appropriate letter on your scan sheet.

A. Strongly agree B. Agree C. Neutral D. Disagree E. Strongly disagree

9. I learned a great deal from this course.
10. The instructor prepared well for classes.
11. The instructor spoke clearly and audibly.
12. The subject matter was clearly presented by the instructor.
13. The instructor put material across in an interesting way.
14. Students were able to express themselves freely as a result of the instructor's openness to their ideas.
15. The instructor was willing to help students who experienced difficulty in the course.
16. The instructor respected students as persons.
17. The instructor was fair in grading examinations and assignments.
18. The goals and objectives of this course were well defined.
19. This course effectively met these objectives.
20. This course was well coordinated and well organized.
21. Supplemental course material, such as handouts, visual aids, bibliographies, etc., enriched this course.
22. The textbook was an asset to this course.
23. Assignments were relevant to course content.
24. Examinations related well to the material emphasized in the course.
25. Examinations and assignments were graded and returned within a reasonable time to students.

IV. Please respond to the following by marking the appropriate letter on your scan sheet. A. Yes B. No

26. Was adequate time allowed to complete this evaluation?
27. Was the instructor absent from the classroom while you completed this evaluation?

Fall 1991

Appendix B

TEACHER COMMUNICATION STYLE STUDY

On the green scan sheet (upper right side: Items 1-30) fill in the following to reflect the extent to which you agree or disagree with these statements. Use only the numbers 1 - 6 for each item.

6=strongly agree
5=moderately agree
4=mildly agree
3=mildly disagree
2=moderately disagree
1=strongly disagree

1 The instructor allows us to see who he really is.
2 The instructor doesn't know exactly what we are feeling.
3 I would say that the instructor is comfortable in social situations.
4 The instructor stands up for his rights.
5 The students know what the instructor is thinking.
6 I would say that the instructor's friends truly believe that he cares about them.
7 The instructor can persuade others to his position.
8 I would say that the instructor feels insecure in groups of strangers.
9 The instructor lets us know that he understands what we say.
10 I would say that the instructor reveals how he feels to others.
11 Students think that the instructor understands them.
12 The instructor has trouble standing up for himself.
13 The instructor takes charge of conversations he's in by negotiating what topics are talked about.
14 In conversations with students, the instructor perceives not only what the students say, but what they don't say.
15 It is difficult to find the right word to express himself.
16 The instructor communicates with students as equals.
17 The instructor looks us in the eye when he speaks.
18 I would say that the instructor has trouble convincing others to do what he wants them to do.
19 I would say that the instructor feels relaxed in small group gatherings.
20 The students can tell when the instructor is happy or sad.
21 The instructor's communication is usually descriptive, not evaluative.
22 In this class the instructor accomplished his communication goal.
23 The instructor can put himself in our shoes.
24 The instructor's conversations are pretty one-sided.
25 The instructor's mind wanders during conversations.
26 I would say when the instructor feels close to people he tells them how he feels.
27 I would say that when the instructor has been wronged, he confronts the person who wronged him.
28 When talking to students the instructor smoothly shifts from one topic to the next.
29 The instructor expresses himself well verbally.
30 I would describe the instructor as warm.

Thank you very much for participating.

TEACHER COMMUNICATION STYLE STUDY
FALL 1992

To Students:

We are examining how students perceive their teachers.

Please do not put your name on this questionnaire. Your answers are confidential and anonymous, and only group data, not that of individuals, will be analyzed. Please complete each and every question as honestly as possible. There are no right or wrong answers. We just want to find out how you feel. Your responses are important to us because they will add to what we know about teaching.

We would like to know how you view the instructor based on your observations of him/her.

First, here are 30 statements about how your instructors interact with students and other people. For each statement, fill in the circle on the scan sheet with the response that best reflects how you feel your instructor communicates with others. We are using "HE" generically for all instructors, male and female, only because the use of he/she is awkward.

If you **STRONGLY AGREE** with the statement, fill in the number 6.
If you **MODERATELY AGREE** with the statement, fill in the number 5.
If you **MILDLY AGREE** with the statement, fill in the number 4.
If you **MILDLY DISAGREE** with the statement, fill in the number 3.
If you **MODERATELY DISAGREE** with the statement, fill in the number 2.
If you **STRONGLY DISAGREE** with the statement, fill in the number 1.

<u>Please turn this sheet over to begin reading the statements on the questionnaire.</u>

11/92 SJB and CRB